

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

SYRIA: REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION



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EDITORIAL

As you probably know, this pamphlet was crowdfunded, not only to cover regular costs but to pay a translator to print in both English and Arabic. We thank everyone who contributed to the crowdfunding campaign, and Miream Salameh who translated the articles.

This pamphlet contains five articles on the Syrian revolution, originally published over five years, from 2015-2019 on the Fightback website (<http://fightback.org.nz>). Given this time span, some are outdated in the facts they present, representing the time of publication.

In Syria today, Assad and his lackeys are flattening entire neighbourhoods, so this little collection of writing seems like a small contribution in terms of solidarity.

However, ugly lies about Syria have become commonplace, infecting even the left¹ which claims to be a bastion of solidarity. We therefore consider it important to tell the truth about Syria, as an absolute minimum commitment of anyone who believes in democracy and self-determination. As the authors of *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* put it, “the start of solidarity is to correct the narrative.”

We insist on the need to learn from a real 21st century revolution, from its inspiring highs to its tragic lows. We have tried to draw from the knowledge and experience of Syrians themselves, with two reviews of books by authors embedded in the revolution, and an interview with a Syrian artist in Australia.

Some may ask what socialists are doing promoting a revolution that’s not directly for socialism. However, as Yassin al-Haj Saleh aptly observes in *The Impossible Revolution*, political freedom and economic justice are intimately connected. Socialism suffocates without democracy, as the legacy of 20th century revolutions reminds us.

On a sombre note, on the 15th of March 2019 far-right terrorists attacked two mosques in Christchurch, with 50 killed. Christchurch has long been a hotbed of white supremacist groups, however this is an escalation in a country that has not experienced mass shootings for over a century. We are glad to see Jacinda Ardern call these attacks what they are – terrorism – however we also note that successive Labour and National governments have focused their ‘anti-terror’ efforts on indigenous, left and Muslim groups as far right terrorists grew unchecked. Those attacked included Syrian children, having escaped state terror at home only to encounter more terror at the end of their journey. We stand against racism, sectarianism and Islamophobia everywhere they emerge.

More optimistically, the ‘Arab Spring’ has re-emerged in Sudan and Algeria. The revolution will never die.

By Ani White, coordinating editor.

1. E.g. Chris Trotter claimed on New Zealand’s most popular left blog that the CIA armed rebels from the early days of the Syrian revolution in 2011 (in fact this did not occur until 2013): <https://thedailyblog.co.nz/2016/10/17/a-howling-moral-vacuum-america-syrian-policy/>

AGAINST CAMPISM: WHAT MAKES SOME LEFTISTS SUPPORT PUTIN?

By Daphne Lawless.

First published November 5, 2015.



At the time of writing, Russian forces are intervening in the civil wars in Ukraine and Syria; supporting the rebellions in the eastern provinces in the first case, and dropping bombs in support of the government of Bashar al-Assad in the second.

While he may have been a general in the old KGB, Vladimir Putin is no socialist. While Russia is formally 'democratic', political rights are very limited for anyone not aligned with Putin's United Russia party. Notoriously, queer communities are persecuted by means of a law against "homosexual propaganda", and Putin has fought a bloody civil war to quell the independence struggle in the republic of Chechnya.

Neo-liberal economics has been used to cut living standards every bit as fiercely as it has in the West.

So why would anyone on the Left support Russia intervening in Ukraine or Syria, any more than they support the United States in Iraq or Afghanistan? Because they do. Leftist magazines like *Counterpunch* support Russian bombs falling in Syria. Several leftists in Aotearoa/NZ are members of a Facebook group called "Vladimir Putin Fan Club NZ. Putin it right !!" (sic)

Multipolar disorder

Several arguments have been used by such people. Perhaps the most serious is that in favour of a "multipolar world". The argument is

that the current world neoliberal system hinges on the unchallenged hegemony of the “Western” bloc, under the military leadership of the biggest imperial power of the planet, the United States. Therefore, a “multipolar” world would mean more freedom for popular forces to move against the global neoliberal order.

The late President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela was a great promoter of this idea. Many Western leftists who supported his government’s struggle for the working people and poor at home were left scratching their heads as he toured the world shaking hands and doing deals with the authoritarian leaderships of Russia or China, or Libya’s Qadhafi. He even supported the Zimbabwean government of Robert Mugabe, which imprisons and tortures socialists, and counted as an ally the Belarusian president Aleksander Lukashenko, who boasts of “wringing the necks” of the political opposition.

As an isolated leader of a socialist government in a capitalist state, Chávez can’t be blamed for trying to get any help he could. But for those of us without the responsibilities of state power, making a virtue out of necessity is not the basis for a political strategy.

This kind of politics is often called “campism” – in the metaphor that the world is divided into several military “camps”, with the largest being the Western camp led by the United States. Therefore, any government which disagrees with American foreign policy – no matter how oppressive to its own people, or however wedded to neoliberal market economics – can be supported. These governments are even called “anti-imperialist” – as if there were only one imperialism, that of the Western bloc. Those who’ve been watching China’s moves to extend its military reach across East Asia, or its economic power in Africa, have good reason to question that.

When two camps go to war...

The best argument which has been made to explain this thought process is that it’s a leftover from the Cold War, when the world was (at first) divided between the Western/USA bloc under the slogan of “freedom”, and the Eastern/Soviet bloc under the slogan of “peace”. Later, China emerged as the leader of a third bloc under a slogan of “national independence”.

At the time, many Western leftists saw the Soviet Union or China as “workers’ states”, which were a better alternative to capitalism. This led to many twists and turns as local parties and movements jumped around to justify the foreign policy of their preferred foreign “socialist” country. It was an article of faith for such groups that since their preferred country was “socialist”, it could not be imperialist, based on Vladimir Lenin’s analysis that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism. Therefore, even when the Soviet Union ransacked eastern Germany’s industrial base after the Second World War, or invaded Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan to support its puppet regimes, this could not be “imperialist” by definition.

In contrast, other socialists refused to take sides. They described themselves as supporters of a “Third Camp” – opposing both the Western/US camp, and the camp of the bureaucratic states claiming to be socialist, with the “camp” of independent working-class action. The Socialist Workers Party in Britain led with the famous slogan of “Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international socialism”. During the workers’ uprising in Poland in the 1980s, while other socialists were trying to justify a Russian-backed military crackdown on the Solidarity independent union, the SWP’s newspaper headline read: “Russian tanks, Western banks, hands off Solidarity.”

Old slogans

One way to see the love-fest for Putin or oth-

er “anti-imperialist” dictatorships is simply a leftover from the days of the Soviet Union. Of course neither Russia nor Syria claim to be any sort of socialist country. But when you’ve spent a long time in the habit of thinking that the real problem in the world is American military hegemony – rather than the global capitalist system which that hegemony really serves – then you can justify any oppressive regime which is anti-American.

The “campists” even still use the old Soviet sloganeering – for example, when they claim that the Russian-backed rebels in Eastern Ukraine are fighting “fascists” in the Ukrainian government. While there certainly are some vile fascist mobs backing the Kiev regime, the mobs who rule the “Novorossiya” zones are only different in the symbols they use. Like the USA uses “anti-terrorism” as an excuse for conquest today, so did the old Soviet Union use “anti-fascism”; the official name of the Berlin Wall was the “Anti-fascist Protection Barrier”.

One sure sign of a campist mindset is that vile behaviour which is condemned on the other side is condoned on one’s own side, or outright denied. Campists are rightly outraged at the beheadings, sex slavery and other barbaric practices of the Islamist extremist group Da’esh (also known as ISIS). But they keep their mouths shut about the Syrian government’s use of “barrel bombs” and poison gas against opposition forces – even arguing that their chemical attack on Ghouta in the suburbs of Damascus was a “false flag” operation.

We are all pawns

The use of the term “false flag” brings up the close alliance of “campism” with conspiracy theory. Campism, which sees the world as something like a “game board” where various governments move their pieces, can’t accept the concept of independent action by oppressed peoples or the working masses. So, every up-

rising against an “anti-imperialist” government is rejected as a CIA-backed “colour revolution”. It’s no coincidence that RT, the Russian government-backed news channel, promotes American conspiracy theorists who are considered a joke in their own media.

And of course the United States have an interest in overthrowing such governments and replacing them with reliable toadies. But to believe that that nullifies the existence of real grassroots movements within such uprisings is to reject the idea that socialist revolution is possible at all, that everything is secretly manipulated by some government or secret service or other such conspiracy. As one British socialist put it: “If you can’t fight for yourself, either because you are too weak or too isolated the temptation is to look for other forces who can do it for you.”

The kind of mindset which could defend Zimbabwe or North Korea as “anti-imperialist” could end up actually supporting Da’esh, on the basis that the democratic Syrian opposition forces have accepted guns from the West – and this is indeed what at least one group calling itself “communist” has declared. It is the logic that “stability” under a dictatorship is better than a chaotic situation of uprisings – a point of view which should be associated with conservative “realists”, not revolutionary socialists.

The enemy at home?

Other times, you hear the argument that “the main enemy is at home”, and therefore we have to oppose our own governments, not foreign governments. “The main enemy is at home” is a slogan that the German socialist Karl Liebknecht used to oppose the Social Democrats’ sell-out to support the First World War, which was justified with the argument that the Tsar of Russia was a much worse tyrant than the Kaiser of Germany.

But the people using that slogan to support the

Syrian or Russian governments on this issue ignore that Liebknecht was opposed to all the imperialist governments fighting in the war. He certainly didn't support the Russian government of the time any more than he cheered on his own. And of course he supported the Russian Revolution which brought down the Tsar from below – not the German armies on the Eastern Front.

We certainly want to oppose our own government. So we have to oppose New Zealand military intervention in Syria, Ukraine or any other civil conflict, and deny any support for the United States military or any Western-backed coalition – just as we oppose the barbarism of the Russian or Syrian governments or Da'esh. But we can't let ourselves become useful idiots for any other oppressive regime. To bring up the World War I example again, Lenin accepted a train ride from the German regime to get back into Russia; but he certainly never supported the Kaiser as a "lesser evil" to the Tsar.

Neither Labour nor National...

We can find campism not only in foreign politics, but domestic politics. You see this in America with the demands that the socialist Left fall in behind the Democratic candidate – even if that's the thoroughly imperialist and pro-capitalist Hillary Clinton – because apparently a Republican victory would be worse than a zombie apocalypse.

Similarly in Aotearoa/New Zealand, we see the division of electoral politics into two "camps" – a National-led camp, and "the Left", being defined as Labour, Greens and New Zealand First. The first two parties are enthusiastically in favour of neoliberal capitalism, and the third support traditional "national" forms of capitalism. None of them has anything to offer the struggle for tino rangatiratanga, real action against climate change or independent workers' organization – and yet, we are confronted with aggressive

demands that we support "the Left" electorally, as if a government of Andrew Little, Winston Peters and James Shaw would be a significant improvement on the John Key regime.

In fact, the over-the-top denunciation of Key – a rather bland merchant banker, interested in entrenching neoliberalism rather than extending it – paradoxically reveals that there is no real difference between the two "camps". Because that's the real secret of campism – someone who aggressively demands that you take a side between two evils has an interest in concealing that the two camps are really not that different. Campism is born of weakness and lack of faith in the ability of real popular forces to build their own alternative to Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Damascus, Wellington and all the others. But that is precisely what socialism is supposed to be about.

Special thanks to Sam Charles Hamad and John Game for ideas and research pointers on this topic.

BURNING COUNTRY: SYRIANS IN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR (BOOK REVIEW)

Authors: Robin Yassin-Kassab, Leila Al-Shami

Publisher: Pluto Press

Released: 2016

Review by: Ani White

Review first published July 13, 2016.



To myself and others in 'the West', Syria's internal crisis has often appeared a confusing mess with no sides worth taking. Competing bombs (Assad bombs, US bombs, Russian bombs) and competing sects (Alawi, Sunni, now ISIS) appear to have displaced the democratic hopes of the Arab Spring. While this despair isn't entirely unfounded, it also risks turning into dismissal. The most significant refugee crisis in a generation perhaps shouldn't be dismissed as 'too complicated'. History may not look on us

kindly for turning away.

In the context of this confusion, promoted as much by 'Russia Today' as Western networks, certain slogans have struck me as important clarifications. When progressive network Democracy Now hosted another in a series of disconnected white men on the Syrian situation, a change.org petition successfully demanded "Tell Democracy Now to have Syrians on to talk about Syria."

This is the clarity offered by *Burning Country*. Written by partisans of the Syrian revolution Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, on the basis of extensive interviews with Syrians, the book offers a clear perspective shining through the muck of sectarianism, propaganda and conspiracy theory.

Burning Country's exposition of the 2011 (and ongoing) revolution emphasises its non-sectarian nature, in keeping with the broader uprisings of the region. Demonstrators chanted 'Sunnis and Alawis are one', defying what has since become the central sectarian divide within Syrian society; between Assad's Alawi minority community, and the 60% Sunni majority.

While the book briefly goes into Syria's ancient history, this account bucks the trend of rooting sectarian conflict in ancient history. Rather, the authors emphasise the long-standing diversity and cosmopolitanism of the

region, with both Damascus and Aleppo claiming the title of 'oldest continuously inhabited city on earth.' Site of the first agricultural revolution, the first alphabet, and a long-standing trading zone, Syrian society has the potential (like any society) to be a progressive hub.

The early days of the revolution expressed these progressive possibilities. Democratic slogans were translated into action through the formation of the Local Coordination Committees, revolutionary networks transcending sect boundaries, described as an 'underground parliament'. Extensive accounts of the cultural transformation – beginning in 2011 and continuing, though besieged, in the liberated zones – cannot be satisfactorily recounted here. The book is worth a read for anyone curious about the meaning of the word 'revolution'.

The authors conversely emphasise the sectarianism of Bashaar al-Assad's supposedly 'secular' regime. At the formal level, atheism is forbidden, and the president must be Muslim. More crucially for this account however, the regime deliberately stokes sectarian tensions to legitimate Assad's rule. In crushing the 2011 revolution, Assad's forces (and regime-militias or *shabeeha*) deliberately targeted Sunni areas, and bolstered the Alawi minority which tends to support Assad's Baathist party. The release of around 1,500 *salafist* (militant Sunni) prisoners was another calculated move designed to stoke sectarian tensions.

In contrast to misleading accounts of sectarianism as 'ancient rivalry', this account emphasises how powerful forces play groups against each other for political gain. As right-wing populism grows internationally (see Trump in the US, and UKIP in England), this sophisticated account can help us think through the splintering of publics for political ends elsewhere. Rather than innate racial rivalries, let alone legitimate expressions of discontent, these formations

reflect manipulation of popular anxieties by elite players.

While the early days of the revolution avoided sectarianism in favour of broad democratic demands, the hardening and militarisation of the revolution allowed Assad's seeds of sectarianism to grow. The authors underline the contradictory nature of religion, as both a balm in oppressive situations, and a tool of the powerful. In the midst of Assad's brutal counter-revolution, they note:

"Tormented, bereaved, and dispossessed, the Syrian people turned more intensely to religion... [yet] most still expressed the desire for a civil rather than Islamic state."

Although local Islamist forces grew with the militarisation of the revolution, these were initially not the cruel militants of ISIS; surveys found that 60% of Syrian Islamic fighters thought that 'democracy is preferable to any other form of governance'. They fought not for an Islamic state, but the end of Assad's tyranny. ISIS appeared as an opportunistic foreign intervention, originating in Iraq and taking advantage of Syria's strife.

Although some Syrians have joined ISIS, and others quietly accept its capacity to offer relative 'stability', Da'esh (as ISIS is called by detractors, with a similar sound to the Arabic for 'donkey') overwhelmingly does not enjoy the support of the Syrian people. Revolutionary intellectual Yassin al-Haj Saleh (whose work *The Impossible Revolution* is reviewed on pages X-X) influentially termed the rise of Da'esh a transition from 'neck-tie fascism' to 'long-beard fascism'. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) fights both Assad's forces and Daesh, and where civilians have an opportunity to resist, they generally join the FSA in beating Daesh back.

Probably the most prominent example of

resistance to Daesh is the widely promoted Kurdish struggle, dominated by the formerly Leninist PYD/PKK and centred in Kobanî. Conversely, the authors underline the ‘ruthless pragmatism’ of the PYD, which has collaborated with the regime. Locals reportedly express bemusement that the small town of Kobanî receives such international attention, while the liberated zone of major city Aleppo remains besieged and isolated.

As in Libya, the call for US intervention in support of the Syrian revolution is controversial. *Burning Country* co-author Leila Al-Shami has clarified in [an interview](#) that she is against US intervention:

“I’m not calling for anything from America. I don’t think America should be involved.”

Conversely, the books’ sympathetic account helps to explain why so many Syrians called for intervention. Between Assad’s brutality and the rise of ISIS, the forces of the revolution have limited resources and few friends. Many Syrians were shocked when Obama’s supposed ‘red line’ of no chemical attacks was ignored, after hundreds were killed in the deadliest chemical attack since the Iran-Iraq War.

Although many leftists oppose any US intervention, this risks devolving into a crudely one-sided ‘[campism](#)’, where the biggest bully is perceived as the only bully. Syrians who have survived Assad’s massacres do not see the world this way. In light of international complacency, Assad has continuously bombed his citizens and subjected them to a ‘surrender or starve’ policy. Calls for a no-fly zone were ignored. Eventual US intervention in 2014 focused only on ISIS, implicitly supporting Assad and (perhaps unsurprisingly) offering no support to the revolution. Meanwhile, Russia and Iran back the regime for an opportunistic

mix of military, economic and political reasons, centrally their own hegemony in the region – any attempt to depict this as ‘anti-imperialism’ makes a mockery of the term. Turkey and the Arab Gulf states have offered some support, the authors note, “not so much [as] allies of the popular revolution as opponents of Assad.”

So what can we do, assuming here a progressive ‘Western’ audience? Most immediately, the refugee crisis demands a humanitarian response, as many realised with the spectre of drowned children washing up on beaches. By July 2015, half of Syria’s population were not living at home – including international refugees and internally displaced. A majority of international refugees live in surrounding countries’ refugee camps, while a growing minority attempt escape to ‘Fortress Europe’. Standing with the refugee and migrant worker movements, we must demand open borders, full rights for migrants and refugees.

Beyond the humanitarian level, Syria’s crisis is *political*, as political as our own interconnected crises. Explaining the non-sectarian nature of the Syrian revolution, and boosting voices of the revolution, can counter the myth of innate Arab-Islamic sectarianism. As the authors of *Burning Country* underline, “The start of solidarity is to correct the narrative.”

The authors encourage readers to learn from Syrian experiences. We must build our own solidarity networks, our own revolutionary strength, if we are to stand with the Syrian revolution. Internationally, Syrian expatriates have formed solidarity groups, largely ignored by an ‘anti-imperialist’ left focusing on the Manichean evil of US intervention. However it may manifest in the specific, Syrian exile groups demand our support. The old [Third Camp](#) slogan can be appropriately reworked: Neither Assad nor ISIS but Free Syria.

THE IMPOSSIBLE REVOLUTION: MAKING SENSE OF THE SYRIAN TRAGEDY (BOOK REVIEW)

Author: Yassin al-Haj Saleh

Publisher: Hurst Publishers

Released: 2017

Review by: Ani White

Review first published February 15, 2018.



As sectarianism and the far-right rear their heads internationally, it's easy to forget the optimism of 2011. Those seeking to understand this trajectory must read Syrian revolutionary Yassin al-Haj Saleh's essay collection *The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy*.

A foreword by Robin Yassin-Kassab, who co-wrote the excellent work *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*, explains why this work is so essential:

"They simply do not see us", [Yassin al-Haj Saleh] laments. If we don't see Syrian revolutionaries, if we don't hear their voices when they talk of their experience, their motivations and hopes, then all we are left with are (inevitably orientalist) assumptions, constraining ideologies, and pre-existent grand narratives. These big stories, or totalising explanations, include a supposedly inevitable

and ancient sectarian conflict underpinning events, and a jihadist-secularist binary, as well as the idea, running counter to all evidence, that Syria is a re-run of Iraq, a Western-led regime change plot. No need to attend to detail, runs the implication, nor to Syrian oppositional voices, for we already know what needs to be known.”

For many ‘anti-imperialists’, this disengagement is a matter of maintaining a clear ideology. Given the focus on the USA as the Great Satan, a situation where the USA’s role is marginal, where a supposedly ‘anti-imperialist’ regime perpetrates mass slaughter with the support of the Russian and Iranian regimes, is ideologically inconvenient. The retreat into conspiracy theory (depicting revolutionaries as foreign agents) serves to warp reality so it stays consistent with ideology.

Although this ideology claims the mantle of anti-imperialism, its proponents see people exactly as empires do; pawns on a global chessboard. To regain our revolutionary conscience, ‘anti-imperialists’ must learn from the ground up, through an allegiance with people rather than states. As a Syrian communist partisan of the revolution, Saleh’s work is crucial in this rethinking of the world.

Having spent 16 years in prison for his political activities, Saleh is an implacable opponent of the regime – yet as the so-called ‘conscience of the revolution’, he is also a thoughtful opponent, raising challenging questions for all who read. Most of the essays in this collection were written during 2011, capturing the spirit of the moment. Yet right from the start, Saleh also delves deeper into historical and structural questions to explain driving factors in the revolution. Later essays, from 2012-2015, provide perhaps the most significant sustained analysis of the revolution’s

tragic collapse available in English.

Saleh’s analysis is both educational on the Syrian situation specifically, and a master-class in structural analysis generally. An early essay outlines the class composition of Syrian society. Saleh identifies a ‘new bourgeoisie’ that is the base of the Assads’ dictatorship; the loyal intellectuals of the ‘Syrian Arab Republic’, who offer superficial opposition without questioning the fundamentals of Assad’s rule; an urban middle class, and a poor rural majority, who together formed the base of the revolution. Saleh suggests that the middle class and poor were united by an experience of work, in contrast to those who prosper without working. This gulf widened during the early 2000s, with the introduction of neoliberal reforms.

To explain how the Assads have maintained power, Saleh often returns to Assad Sr’s development of a brutal security apparatus, and an ideological apparatus centring on Assad himself. This fiefdom was inherited by his son. Saleh argues that this is a fascist state apparatus, a characterisation that is worth thinking through given the international rise of the far right, many in fact exploiting the Syrian refugee crisis.

It is commonly asserted that the Syrian revolution is discredited by sectarianism. In particular, the Sunni majority is often depicted as too sectarian to govern. Although it is a dangerous simplification, this view has a ring of truth as confusing sectarian warfare fills the nightly news: as Saleh grimly notes in his final essay, Syria’s war “promises to be an ideal specimen for the study of sectarianism.” In this disquieting spirit, the later essays consider the problem in detail.

Saleh famously distinguishes between the ‘neck-tie fascists’ of the regime and the ‘long-beard fascists’ of political Islam, indicating the way Syrians are caught between a rock and a hard place. However, he avoids the common

simplification that 'both sides/all sides are equally bad.' He centrally contends that sectarianism is a political tool, not a matter of ancient identity. More specifically, sectarianism is deeply rooted in the Assadist regime itself.

Saleh's final essay, the longest in the collection, roots modern sectarianism in the Assadist 'neo-Sultanic state.' This state opportunistically fosters sectarianism in various ways, all preserving a dictatorial power structure. Firstly, the 'neo-Sultanic state' fosters sectarianism with the elevation of Alawites, an Islamic sect of which the 'Sultans' (Assads) are members. Secondly, while the repressive apparatus (or 'inner state') is sectarian, the ideological apparatus (or 'outer state') maintains a kind of hollow secularism that represses discussion of sectarianism. Thirdly, the development of a corrupt 'clientelism' (bribes, favours for friends, and other forms of cronyism) that favours some sects over others.

Saleh argues that sectarianism is ultimately about class, providing cultural justifications for material hierarchies. In Syria specifically, the Sunni majority is dispossessed, and their poverty is blamed on their cultural ignorance.

In this repressive context, devoid of a common civil society, it is remarkable that the 2011 revolution saw such a flowering of non-sectarian sentiment. Slogans such as 'Sunnis and Alawis are One' defied the Balkanisation of communities fostered under the Assad regime.

To undercut the legitimacy of the uprising, Assad's regime set out to stoke sectarianism. The regime carried out massacres targeting Sunnis well before the revolutionaries armed themselves, and infamously released many Salafists from jail.

Saleh refers to the growth of political Islam in this context as a kind of 'militant nihilism' – seeing the whole world as corrupted, withdrawing into

an abstracted mental space that justifies all manner of cleansing violence. Nonetheless, Saleh maintains that this is only a defensive posture given the besieged and isolated position of the Sunni majority (note that this analysis does not apply to ISIS, who are essentially an occupying power not borne of the revolution).

With the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict, many observers have returned to the confirmation bias which says Sunni Arabs are too backwards to govern, too easily forgetting what 2011 illuminated. While discussing the many sectarian 'fiefdoms' developing by 2013, Saleh clarifies: "The fall of the regime would not mean an end to the process of 'feudalization' – but there is no hope of stopping this feudalization without overthrowing the regime."

Saleh promotes a democratic Syrian nationalism, as an alternative to both Assad's Syria and an Islamic state.

This progressive nationalism is worth considering critically. Saleh suggests that only the revolutionaries truly adhere to the ideal of 'Syria', often implying their enemies are not truly Syrian (whether by citizenship or philosophy). Assad's regime is regularly compared to a colonial regime, and Islamists are depicted as fundamentally more international than local. These are compelling points, and everyone can probably agree that tensions internal to Syria have been exploited by various international actors. At one point Saleh suggests in passing that the 'central bourgeoisie' could also be considered an 'external bourgeoisie' due to its international trade. However, identifying the revolution with 'Syria' and counter-revolutionary enemies with 'foreignness' seems surprisingly Manichean for such a sophisticated thinker (and an ironic inversion of the Assadist propaganda that all rebels are foreign agents). Even if international forces exploit divisions in Syrian society, that doesn't mean that all enemies come

from outside Syrian society. Some may also question Saleh's position on the Kurdish national question, apparently believing that a liberated Syria should include Kurdish territory under a single nation (though recognising linguistic and cultural rights), in contrast to the secessionist position held by the Kurdish leadership.

Conversely, Saleh's nationalism is far from an unthinking adherence; rejecting the stifling culture of the Assad regime, he calls for the development of a pluralist Republican intellectual culture. Saleh's nationalism is more Gramscian than jingoistic, seeking the development of a new civil society, and his 'Syria' is aspirational. For Saleh and other Syrian revolutionaries, 'Free Syria' holds the promise of a unity based on common citizenship rather than Balkanised sects. Saleh also treats 'Free Syria' as a provisional goal that would enable further possibilities, an opening rather than a closing; he argues that while the struggle for 'political freedom' is currently primary, this would enable the fight for economic justice, among other liberation struggles. This vision stands in stark contrast to the Assadist form of 'Modernization', which treats the Sunni majority as children to be managed for their own good, rather than democratic subjects.

The Impossible Revolution is essential reading for anyone considering social transformation in the 21st Century. It should be read along with *Burning Country*.

“ALL THE WORLD WILL BE AFFECTED, NOT JUST SYRIA”: INTERVIEW WITH A SYRIAN AUSTRALIAN ARTIST

Ani White interviews Miream Salameh, a Syrian artist living in Melbourne.

First published October 23, 2018.



First of all, can you tell us why you were forced to seek refuge and how this happened?

At the beginning of the revolution, I worked with a group of my friends to create a magazine against the tyrannical regime that ruled Syria for fifty years. This regime is represented by the Assad family, which seized power in a military coup by Hafez al-Assad.

Our aim in founding this magazine was to present our ideas, the goals and principles of our revolution and our dream of building a new free, civil and democratic Syria. All of us should be equal under the law that achieves equality and

justice for all. The aim was also to document the crimes of the Assad regime and its violations of international law - which is still under the eyes of the entire international community - against all those who have participated in this revolution and supported it even with a word.

But after six months we were forced to stop it after we were attacked by the Assadist forces. I remember very well how in the second raid we miraculously survived the inevitable deaths by field execution that Assad carried out at every raid. I lost two of my friends in that brutal way; during a raid on Deir Baalba in Homs in the first

year of the revolution, the Assad gangs shot my friend Hatem Mohammad, who was an artist too, directly in his head and heart. His relatives could not take the body until fifteen days after Assad's forces left the area – or face being arrested or dying under torture in his prisons. On this day we were three friends in the house watching a video that I filmed in a region loyal to Assad in Homs to document the crimes of Assad and his regime. In this video I documented the stolen property that Assad's regime and its intelligence and army were selling at the lowest prices in a market they call the Sunni market; they rob those areas whose people were shelled and forced to flee, then the Assad regime enters and steals, and sometimes do not just do that, they also burn some houses. One person shown in the video told how when they left these areas with cars full of stolen stuff, the army at the checkpoints took the LCD screens and laptops and left them the rest of the stuff to sell in the Sunni market.

Going back to the raid day, as we watched the video and handed over the caricatures, Assad's forces began to besiege the neighbourhood and prepared to raid it. I quickly went out with my friends who took me out of the neighbourhood and then returned to document what would happen. Assad's forces committed an outrageous massacre, killing 20 people and arresting many, including women, who were stripped naked in public, and arrested them. Assad's forces destroyed all our things and stole all that was valuable. During that time I received many threats and warnings, and was forced to leave for Lebanon without informing anyone. But death threats, arrests and rape will continue if I try to go back to my country. During my stay in Lebanon, one week after my arrival in Australia, I was attacked along with my friends by Hezbollah and they attempted

to kidnap me. But we were rescued with the help of two Lebanese gendarmes and three Syrian people who were there by chance and brought us home safely. I don't know if I would be alive now otherwise. Then we came here on a humanitarian visa.

How did the Syrian revolution begin? What were the demands of the revolution?

The Syrian revolution began after students at a school in Daraa wrote anti-Assad slogans on the walls of their schools. So the Assad regime arrested and tortured them and this angered their parents who went to claim and demand the release of their children, but the security forces told them: forget your children and make others, and if you cannot, send us your women to do so. People in Daraa began to take to the streets and demand the release of their children and all those detained in Assad's prisons. These demonstrations moved to the rest of the Syrian cities, one of these was my city Homs. Our demands were initially to reform the regime, release the detainees and abolish the state of emergency, but the regime did not respond to these demands and tried to suppress the demonstrations in a brutal way, from firing live bullets at the demonstrators to firing missiles, and using internationally prohibited weapons such as cuneiform bombs. They carried out campaigns of detention against all those suspected of joining the revolution or supporting it even with a word, but the more violence the regime inflicted, the more the demonstrations grew to overthrow this bloody regime and build a free democratic civil state in which we all live equally under a law that protects the freedom and dignity of the individual - not a law that is amended to suit the regime's interests, the way they did when Hafez al-Assad died, and they amended the constitution within three minutes to let Bashar take power after his dead father.

Who is primarily responsible for the atrocities (and the political crisis) in Syria?

All the responsibility for war crimes is with the regime of Assad, no one else, all the destruction and half a million refugees at home and abroad, and large numbers of detainees and abductees. The Assad regime committed all of this and was responsible for it with the help of his Russian and Iranian allies, as well as ISIS, al-Qaeda and the Nusra Front. I include ISIS and al-Qaeda in this because Assad assisted them in entering Syria and put them in the areas to be a pretext for him to bombard and control and create displacement of their people. No-one benefits from their presence as much as Assad. In addition to al-Qaeda, Assad is the one who released the extremists and criminals from his prisons at the beginning of the revolution, for the same reasons that I mentioned earlier and to make it seem like our revolution is Islamist in form. Thus he has a strong argument before world public opinion to eliminate the revolution. Assad is the one who released Zahran Alloush [leader of the Jaysh al-Islam armed faction] who used people as shields and put them on the roofs of houses to prevent Assad from shelling them. He is no different from the Assad regime and is similar in criminality. All these Assad did to justify the war crimes he committed against unarmed civilians, bombarding them in their schools and homes, hospitals and markets using internationally banned weapons including phosphorus, chemical and others.

We all saw the massacre committed against our people in as-Suwayda city at the hands of ISIS. But we all know who brought them on buses from Yarmouk camp to the east of as-Suwayda to control the area there. This claim comes from the people of as-Suwayda who knew Assad's games and put all the responsibility for what

happened there on the Assad regime. And some of them said that the kidnappers all were Da'esh [ISIS], in fact they were detainees in the prisons of the regime.

The Assad regime is the one who made our land an area of ??international conflicts between America, Russia and others. There is so much evidence that the only man responsible for what happened to my country is Assad.

How do you respond to claims that Assad protects Christians and minorities?

Assad did not protect the minorities but protected himself by using them. The Assad regime did not show mercy to any of its opponents, neither the Christian nor the Druze, nor even the Alawites, who are the sect he belongs to. He arrested and killed a lot under torture and displaced them. Also he killed people whom were from his own sect and loyalists at the beginning of the revolution to claim that it was the rebels who killed them, and to lie to them that our revolution was an Islamic revolution aimed at killing all the minorities, I remember once sitting in al-Arman area, one of them told me: We shelled three buildings here in al-Arman. I asked him why he did that. He said because we want to make the people here believe that the revolutionaries did it and that their revolution is an Islamic revolution. I told him, but what about the children, women and residents of these buildings who were hit by these missiles? He said: It does not matter, the important thing is to believe what we want and fight alongside the regime. The regime has done a lot of these dirty tricks.

I am from the Christian minority in Syria and from a village called Marmarita, a Christian village in Wadi al-Nasara. I was forced to flee

my country after I received many threats just because I stood against this criminal regime and participated in the revolution. Many young people in my village were arrested for the same reason, and after their release they immediately left the country. The artist and my teacher Wael Qustoun, who is from my village and was based in Homs, was arrested by the Assad intelligence and tortured to death because of his refusal to paint a helmet for the army. None of his family members knew of his fate until someone saw his body in the hospital with 200 other bodies. That person called the Wael family to take his body before they took him with the rest, to bury them in mass graves without informing anyone about their fate or what happened to them inside the prison. They forced his family to say that the unknown armed groups were the ones who kidnapped Wael and killed him. This what happened to me and my family and people really close to me. There are many, many more stories that anyone can learn, like the story of Marcel Chahrou, Basil Shehadeh and many others. They deny the claims that Assad protects minorities.

What role have international actors played in Syria, particularly the USA and Russia?

I am not a political analyst, but everyone who follows the Syrian situation is fully aware that no one cared about the death and displacement of the Syrian people. The Russians, the Iranians and Hezbollah participate with Assad in his war crimes against defenceless people. This applies to America and even to Australia, when they participated in the bombing under the pretext of eliminating terrorism.

We all know that all of them took part in this for their own interests, so that they don't care about Assad himself and were ready to get rid of him

when they were done with him. Even the Turks themselves, who some believe they are friends of the Syrian people, killed many Syrians as they crossed the border to escape the bombing to Turkey.

America has bombed many military sites and bases of Assad: but it is known to the free Syrian people that it is not because it cares about the Syrian people, especially after Trump's decision to prevent Syrians from entering America. This applies to everyone.

After almost seven years, we no longer trust anyone, not even the United Nations and the international community, who could not prevent Assad from committing his own massacres, especially forced displacement and ethnic cleansing against the people, which is an international war crime under UN resolutions. Instead of stopping that, they were working to find safe passages to Syrians leave their homes and neighbourhoods. That is, Assad committed this crime under their auspices, and they came in after that and set up tents for us in neighbouring countries.

Can you explain what Assad and Putin's assault on Idlib means for Syrian politics?

It's crushing one of the last areas held by the revolutionaries. The same will happen as happened in Aleppo, Darya and Ghouta - massacres of people. Idlib has refugees from those areas that have already been assaulted. So three million people will be attacked. Assad is ethnically cleansing, which is a war crime. It will not relieve things for us, and also Turkey will face a huge wave of refugees. And many refugees will go by boat to reach Europe. All the world will be affected if this happens to Idlib, not just Syria.

And Turkey made a deal with Russia, to pursue a political resolution, not because Turkey cares about the people and want to save lives, I think Turkey just wants to save their country and not have to deal with refugees. And we all know what Russia and Assad want from Idlib, they want all of the territory in regime hands.

How do you respond to claims that the revolution is simply sectarian?

How can the revolution be sectarian? It includes all people from different religious backgrounds. There are the Druze, the Christian, the Alawi, the Sunni, and all of us have a dream of building a free and democratic Syria that is equal to everyone under the law. But what we talked about previously, about the release of the extremists by Assad and giving ISIS entry to our country, in addition to the media, which also played a big role in the painting of our revolution as Islamist. Not just this, but also it tried to show that there was no revolution at the start; when the media mention the Syrian situation they only mention civil war and never mentioned the Syrian revolution. But after seven years of the Assad regime, trying to crush our revolution in the most brutal ways, and the hypocrisy of the big powers and the international community and the United Nations closing their eyes to the crimes of Assad against us, the demonstrations in Idlib embarrass them all showing that the revolution is not dead, and did not die, and will not die.

During the revolution, its activists whose work was characterized by civil action were targeted by all the extremist parties represented by ISIS, al-Qaeda and the Assad regime. Naji Al-Jarf was targeted by ISIS who shot at him in Turkey, and Jaysh al-Islam kidnapped Razan Zaytounah and her comrades, whose fate we

do not yet know, and many more who were targeted by ISIS and al-Qaeda. And we don't need to mention what the Assad regime did and still does to all of the activists of the revolution, because it is clear and obvious to all of us. All these criminals share one interest: to eliminate the revolution because they know that the victory of the revolution means the end of all of them.

What bearing does understanding the political situation in Syria have on refugee solidarity in Australia?

When we started leaving Syria in the first year of the revolution, the government badmouthed refugees. I don't think the government cares about refugees. I remember there was one guy who was in the detention centre in Syria, and the Australian government deported him back to Syria, and the Syrian government arrested him there for 28 days, and they bombed his area and killed his father. If I went back to Syria, they would arrest me.

You've said Australia has a discriminatory refugee policy in how it ranks Syrians. Can you explain that?

Australia gave priority in granting asylum to Christian asylum seekers, ignoring the many refugees who had been stranded in the refugee camps for almost 7 years without any basic necessities of life, and that leads these people to risk their lives and the lives of their children at sea. Those who survived the drowning were detained in the detention centres of Nauru and Manus Island. In these prisons, there are families - women and children held for four years - and many more. Can you imagine children being forced to spend their childhood in such places, after they survived inevitable death in their country, for no reason?

In Australia, the boats were stopped under the pretext of preserving people's lives. But if they really cared, they would offer an alternative to getting in unsafe boats, and offer a real solution to their suffering, like granting a humanitarian visa, easing restrictions on humanitarian visas. Humanitarian visas should be based on the conditions that people are in, not based on needing sponsors. Also Australia has bombed my country and made more refugees. If they really cared, they would not participate in the bombing.

What do you think about the protests against Trump's bombings?

It's funny how people get angry about this bombing, when the US has been bombing my country since 2014, and killing many civilians, yet people only protest when he bombs an Assad military base, killing nobody, and announcing it in advance so that Assad could evacuate. Listen to Syrians before you try to do something for us.

Do Syrian refugees (practically speaking) have the right to return?

The right of refugees to return will not happen until something changes in our country. They need to stop the ethnic cleansing. Assad remains in power. They need to address these things, before they talk about our return to Syria. It will not be possible to return while the regime stays in power. And in terms of ISIS and al-Qaeda, as long as the regime stays in power these problems will continue. First Assad needs to be taken out of power, then we need to address the sectarianism, then we can rebuild our country.

What can people in Australia or Aotearoa do to support Syrians?

We have to listen to Syrians, convey the truth of

what's going on, stand together as people and pressure the government here, and the rest of the world's governments. My country, especially the media, is politicized. We must exert great pressure on the international community and the United Nations to do their work honestly, in protecting the human rights for which they were founded.

I believe that only people have the power to change for a better world. I believe that this will be the first serious step to stand with the Syrian people in their revolution and end their ordeal.

IT'S NOT ABOUT 'REGIME CHANGE': A BRIEF HISTORY OF US INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

By Ani White.

First published January 11, 2019.



Chomsky's criticism of US withdrawal from Kurdish-held territory poses a strange contradiction; why have so many on the left accused Syrian Arab rebels of being US proxies, while either supporting or remaining silent on the far more consistent US support of the Kurdish SDF against ISIS?

Given the widespread misinformation about Syria, a basic rundown of the facts about US involvement is necessary. This is a very brief outline of well-known facts about the war – for a more detailed analysis of the various forces involved, the work of Michael Karadjis is particularly recommended.

The dominant narrative on the left holds that US involvement in Syria is an attempt at 'regime change.' As highlighted by Karadjis, this is in contradiction with the statements of US officials:

- In 2016, declaring that the US was “not seeking so-called regime change as it is known in Syria,” Obama's Secretary of State John Kerry added that the US and Russia see the conflict “fundamentally very similarly.”
- In March 2017, Trump's UN representative, Nikki Haley, despite her own tendency to spout anti-Assad rhetoric,

declared that the Trump administration was “no longer” focused on removing Assad “*the way the previous administration was.*”

- The same month, Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, noted that “The United States has profound priorities in Syria and Iraq, and we’ve made it clear that counterterrorism, particularly the defeat of ISIS, is foremost among those priorities. With respect to Assad, there is a political reality that we have to accept.”
- In July 2017, then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson clarified that the only fight in Syria is with ISIS, that Assad’s future is Russia’s issue, and he essentially called the regime allies: “We call upon all parties, including the Syrian government and its allies, Syrian opposition forces, and Coalition forces carrying out the battle to defeat ISIS, to avoid conflict with one another ...”
- Following the one-off US strike on an empty Assadist air-base after Assad’s horrific chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib, US National Security Advisor HR McMaster clarified that the US had no concern with the fact that the base was being used to bomb Syrians again the very next day, because harming Assad’s military capacities was not the aim of the strike; and far from “regime change”, the US desired a “change in *the nature of the Assad regime* and its *behavior* in particular.” [note: not a change in the nature of the regime, a change in the nature of the *Assad* regime].
- Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s speech in January 2018 focused on supporting the Geneva process for a “political solution,” but now the US no longer expected Assad to stand down at the beginning of a transition phase as under early Obama, *or even at its end* as under

late Obama; rather, US policy was to wait for an eventual “free election” under Assad: “The United States believes that free and transparent elections ... will result in the permanent departure of Assad and his family from power. This process will take time, and we urge patience in the departure of Assad and the establishment of new leadership.”

- Even before his most recent, more blatant, statement, [Trump’s special envoy to Syria Jim Jeffrey] had already made a similar statement in his November 29 address to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Syria, declaring that the US was committed to a political process that “will change the nature and the behaviour of the Syrian government ... *this is not regime change, this is not related to personalities.*”¹

However, it’s not enough to take officials at their word. Do these claims contradict the actual practice of US intervention? Well, no.

The USA has continuously attacked ISIS-held territory since 2014, killing thousands of civilians.² Meanwhile, two direct actions against Assad – an airfield bombing in 2017, and a chemical weapons factory bombing in 2018 – killed nobody, and both sought to warn the regime against chemical weapons attacks, rather than remove it from power per se. These two actions prompted widespread protests in the Anglosphere, while continuous US attacks on ISIS-held territory prompted silence, or in some cases support (see the open letter to the US to ‘defend Rojava’ signed by David Harvey,

1 Trump leaves Syria: On ‘regime change’ and other tall stories: <https://mkaradjis.wordpress.com/2018/12/21/trump-leaves-syria-on-regime-change-and-other-tall-stories/>

2 Entire families wiped out: US airstrikes killed many civilians in Syria: <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/09/664360606/entire-families-wiped-out-u-s-airstrikes-killed-many-civilians-in-syria>

David Graeber and Noam Chomsky among others). If the USA sought to remove Assad from power, why not bomb Damascus? Why focus primarily on ISIS-held territory?

Crucially, the war began not with US involvement, but with an independent popular regional rebellion (against both US-backed states and 'anti-imperialist' ones), that was militarily attacked by Assad. In August 2012, Obama famously stated that any use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime was a "red line" that if crossed would invite direct US intervention. Yet in 2013, the Obama administration backed down from a threatened bombing campaign after Assad's use of chemical weapons in East Ghouta killed 1,400 people.³

Although the USA offered some assistance to the Syrian rebels, this was limited. The Assad regime was able to rain death on the rebels from the sky, while rebels were limited to ground forces, so to beat Assad they would have needed aerial support or weaponry. Yet the CIA specifically blocked Saudi Arabia from providing the rebels with anti-aircraft weapons,⁴⁵ and the USA did not implement a No-Fly Zone. While the reasons for this are murky, they may include the fact that US policy was an ad hoc response to a volatile situation, that many rebels were anti-Zionist and hard to control, and/or the 'realist' policy of the Obama administration. Obama infamously mocked the rebels as "farmers or dentists" and said training them would take a lot of time and resources,⁶

3 A history of the Syria chemical weapons 'red line': <https://www.france24.com/en/20180414-syria-chemical-weapons-red-line-obama-macron-assad-russia-usa-france-idlib>

4 Armed conflict in Syria: Overview and US response: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/591c08bc4.pdf>

5 US denies lifting MANPADs ban to Syrian rebels: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/12/27/us-denies-denies-lifting-manpads-ban-to-syrian-rebels>

6 Former CIA director: Obama said Syrian opposition was made up of doctors and pharmacists: <https://>

showing a lukewarm attitude to the situation.

Finally, in 2014, ISIS intervention in the Syrian war triggered expanded US involvement. Contrary to narratives which reduce the Syrian revolution to ISIS, the group formed in Iraq, recruited internationally, and opportunistically intervened in the Syrian war as an occupying force – 3 years into the conflict. In September 2014, Congress approved a \$500 million expansion of funding for US involvement, focused on equipping rebels to fight ISIS.⁷ A number of rebels left the training programme after it *specifically placed a condition on trainees that they only fight ISIS and not Assad's forces*.⁸ This led to the US swivel towards supporting the Kurdish forces, which increasingly reached a detente with Assad against their common enemy ISIS. The USA also began bombing ISIS-held territory.

US forces would not directly intervene against Assad until 2017, after the chemical weapons attack in Douma. At this point Trump warned Assad and Putin of the attack, allowing them to evacuate the targeted airfield. This was a symbolic action, at most a warning against further chemical weapons attacks. Again, if the intention was to take out Assad, the USA could have rained death on Damascus rather than Raqqa.

In sum, US policy in Syria since at least 2015 has focused primarily on fighting ISIS, while remaining complicit with Assad. This is not a defence of US policy; complicity with Assad is

www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/sep/14/michael-hayden/former-cia-director-obama-said-syrian-opposition-w/

7 Syria's moderate rebels say they need weapons not training: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-syria-rebels-insight/syrias-moderate-rebels-say-they-need-weapons-not-training-idUSKBN0HA0QX20140915>

8 Syrian Opposition Fighters Withdraw from US 'Train and Equip' Program: https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/29743/syrian_opposition_fighters_withdraw_from_us_train_equip_program.html

a bad thing. Trump's recent claim that "Russia, Iran, Syria & others are the local enemy of ISIS. We were doing there [sic] work" is a logical extension of this policy.

As for why so many leftists falsely characterise the intervention as a 'regime change' effort, a few factors seem salient:

- Reducing a complex situation to an easily understandable one.
- Relatedly, failing to catch up with a shift in geopolitics whereby the Trump and Putin administrations increasingly converge around reactionary politics.
- Most fundamentally, solidarity with states rather than people; Assad is imagined to have 'sovereignty' despite obviously fake elections, while the Syrian people are secondary.

Those who still identify with the left must catch up with reality; we risk irrelevance at best, and siding with reaction at worst.

STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE SUDANESE AND ALGERIAN UPRISINGS

Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists

<https://www.allianceofmesocialists.org/statement-of-solidarity-with-the-sudanese-and-algerian-uprisings/>

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Many are watching with growing astonishment as the Sudanese and Algerian uprisings have emerged over the past few months, defying the counter-revolutionary wave that swept the region following the Middle East and North Africa uprisings of 2011. Ironically, Omar al-Bashir's last international visit was to Syria's Bashar al-Assad to show his support to the surviving ancien regime that looks to have weathered the storm, only to return to an uprising that has challenged everything from IMF austerity measures to the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of the regime. Though the protests have been ongoing for several months now, mainstream international media has only just started to take notice. Their disinterest has also ignored the tens of thousands of teachers protesting in Morocco in the past few months, and the ups and downs of revolt and repression throughout the region as a whole.

The level of sophistication of organizing in both the Sudanese and Algerian uprisings reignites the hope that a new wave of uprising can achieve the initial demands of the revolutionary processes started in 2011 in their quest for dignity, equality and freedom. The Sudanese and Algerian diasporas have played a crucial role in spreading the revolution beyond their national borders, calling on all those who believe that the struggle should be international to join them.

At the time of writing, the Sudanese uprising has already succeeded in removing and imprisoning Omar al-Bashir—who has been wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide since 2009. As he has been forced out of power, his successor, army lieutenant Awad Ibn Auf, was himself not able to hold office for more than twenty-four hours. Protestors have also called on Ibn Auf's successor, General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, to bow out and oversee a transition to civilian power.

Less than two weeks earlier, Algeria's mass protests forced Abdelaziz Bouteflika to announce that he would step down and not run for a fifth term, leading to his replacement by an interim government that is a spitting image of Bouteflika's ancien regime.

In both countries, the overthrow of individual figureheads of the regime is understood to be far from enough. The call is to continue and deepen the uprisings until fundamental political and socio-economic changes are made in favor of the popular classes, completely replacing the old regimes and their rulers.

The Sudanese and Algerian protesters have learned from their past revolutionary struggles and from the neighboring counter-revolutionary

regimes that only through popular resistance, mass participation, and self-organization will they be able to achieve radical change and democratic and socio-economic rights.

Various dictatorial regimes, regional and imperialist powers have witnessed the developments of these latest popular uprisings with fear, viewing them as a threat to their own interests and powers. In response, they have expressed their support to the Sudanese and Algerian heads of the army and encouraged them to retain control. Alongside these calls, these regional and international actors have warned directly or indirectly against the continuation and deepening of the revolutionary process.

We state our continuous solidarity with the Sudanese and Algerian popular classes, as well as with the rest of region. Their struggles are an inspiration for all those fighting for the emancipation and liberation of the oppressed throughout the world.

In this perspective, we urge leftist and progressive organizations and networks around the world to express their solidarity with the new waves of uprisings in Sudan and Algeria and continuous resistance in the region. Organize protests in your respective countries in front of embassies, consulates and state representatives in coordination with the revolutionary diasporas accompanying the uprising. Continue to follow events as they unfold, in order to take action if the movements face greater levels of repression. During this critical period, only pressure from the streets in and outside of Sudan, Algeria, Morocco and beyond can guarantee the success of the second wave of the Middle East and North African uprisings.

ABOUT FIGHTBACK

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

OUR 10-POINT PROGRAMME

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

1. **Constitutional transformation** based on indigenous self-determination and workers power. Indigenous and worker co-ops to operate as guardians over public resources.
2. **Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be supplemented with a Universal Basic Income, removal of punitive sanctions.
3. **International working-class solidarity.** Close the Detention Centres. Open borders to Australia and Aotearoa, full rights for migrant workers. Recognise Pasefika rights to self-determination, Australia and Aotearoa to contribute to a 'no-strings' development fund for Pacific nations. Opposition to all imperialist ventures and alliances; neither Washington nor Moscow.
4. **No revolution without women's liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. **An ecosocialist solution** to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
6. **Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7. **Abolish prisons**, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
8. **Universal right to housing.** Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9. **Fully-funded healthcare** at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.
10. **Fully-funded education** at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining indigenous knowledge as a core part of the curriculum.

More detail on this programme is available in our pamphlet What is Fightback?



"The Dictator" by Johny Salameh